



## MINDFUL USE OF “I”

A professor once challenged me to not use “we,” “our,” or “us” when reflecting on my own experiences. The shift was requested so I could take more ownership of what experiences were mine and not speak on behalf of others. I couldn’t write, “We need to stop stereotyping.” I wrote, “I need to stop stereotyping.” The difference between these statements shifted an idea that appeared unattainable to a value I could work on. I then better understood why the professor made this request of our class – oops, me – to not use these pronouns.

While I struggled to reframe my experiences, I learned the value of this language shift. My reflections became more personal; I learned about what I valued. One impactful shift I made was, “We value independence.” I asked myself if this was a value I held or if it was from my culture. I rephrased: “I value my own independence.” Revisiting statements made me connect to my writing more deeply, and I applied this technique to other writing.

Since shifting my use of pronouns, I increased the clarity in my writing; I’m now conscious about who I’m speaking for or talking about. For example, it is unclear who I’m talking about when I say, “We have systemic issues that perpetuate oppression and need to change.” Who has this problem? Who needs to change? I may rephrase: “The US has systemic issues that perpetuate oppression, and we, as citizens, need to change our system.” In the second sentence, it is clearer who I am speaking for and about. When using these pronouns, I’m careful to clarify the group so as to respect the group I’m speaking for. I empower others to discover what they can learn via this unique language shift.

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